CHAPTER FOUR

Section A: Role of Medicine Man in Dafa Society

1. Introduction

1.1. The Dafas believe in a supernatural world saturated with spirits (eiyu) of all kinds good and evil. The majority of these spirits are considered to be maleficent and they are the causes of sickness, misfortune, accident and death. In fact, this belief in the evil power is so engulfling that any accidental misfortune is attributed to them. These evil spirits roam about to hunt human souls and it is the magician-priest (neibu) who can control and appease them with appropriate ceremonies and sacrifices. The office of neibu combines the functions of priest and magician. On the other hand, the benevolent spirits look to the wellbeing of the people and valuable properties cannot be obtained without their mercy. Most of the benevolent spirits are believed to remain indifferent to human affairs and sacrifices are very rarely offered to them.

1.2. This system of ideas regarding good or evil spirits with a corresponding belief in their reality and the powers to do good or evil lead them to a system of ritualistic practices, the essence of the latter resting in various kinds of sacrifices. But only the richer section of the population can perform elaborate ceremonies...
which require very costly sacrifices. In Dafla society valuable possessions are utilised primarily for two purposes, the payment of bride-price and dowry and the propitiation of supernatural powers for the welfare of the members of the family. Domestic animals such as pigs, goats and poultry are also valuable possessions, primarily meant for killing on the occasions for propitiating the supernatural powers. The characteristic of the Dafla ritual life is that they do not hesitate to kill and sacrifice, if necessary, all their heads of mithuns and bullocks when serious illness attacks any member of the family. Cases have been reported of a family killing all their mithuns and bullocks when a member is seriously ill. In general, a considerable portion of their crops and other income are spent in pleasing deities and spirits.

1.3. Since they fight against adverse circumstances by spiritual means they approach persons who are supposed to be expert in controlling the supernatural powers believed to be responsible for bringing about happiness or misery. These are the niebus who expert immense influence on the day to day life of every individual.

2. **Pseudo of Niebu**

2.1. A major attribute by which the priest is distinguished from the medicine man is that the priest offers sacrifices and not the medicine man. In Dafla society the position of niebu is somewhat complicated. He is by turn a medicine man, a sorcerer
and a priest as well. He can harm or protect his people. In certain aspects the functions of a niebu is similar to that of a witch doctor: among the Azande (Pritchard, 1960, P.187). His primary function is curing sickness by means of propitiatory rites. An expert niebu always remains busy with such rites in which he offers sacrifices. Moreover, a niebu not only has the power to cure sickness but also has the power to drive it off by magical means. The most important and characteristic feature in shamanism is the ecstasy or trance, during which the soul of the Shaman is believed to leave the body in a state of unconsciousness and journeys to the world of the spirits. This ecstasy also plays its part in the activity of the Dalsa niebu. The niebu, while invoking the spirits in an important ceremonial performance, sometimes passes through a state of ecstasy. The spirit possessing the niebu reveals itself through its human intermediary who reveals future events relating to the clients and even to the villagers who approach the niebu to listen to the forecasts affecting them.

2.2. In Betgarh there are eight niebus, four of whom are supposed to be experts and others are ordinary ones. It is very seldom that women become niebus. In Betgarh there is none. A very expert niebu is called bute niebu and an ordinary one is called brahi niebu. In important ceremonies the villagers employ expert niebus from the hills. There is nothing like regular
training of niebus but it is a matter of learning by observation and consultation with experts. According to some informants some persons have inborn capacities to learn the procedures of divination and can remember magical and religious formulae easily. When a man becomes expert in preliminary works, he is allowed to serve as assistant (bu) to the niebu in some ritual performances. During this period the bu, of course, receives from some expert niebus verbal instructions in regard to everything connected with the profession, above all, the magical and religious formulae which he has to recite on various occasions. In some important ceremonies the duty of the bu is as important as that of the niebu himself. The bu gradually gains importance by performing ritual ceremonies with the niebu. Though there is no fixed period of probation for the bu, he has to serve for several years before he himself can attain the position of a niebu. A niebu under training is known as orumpona. But it is to be noted that all the bus cannot become niebus. When a particular bu cannot prove his worth in the profession he cannot become a full fledged niebu. Out of a number of probationers only a few attain success.

2.3. A bu, when proved to be worthy of his profession, is sometimes asked to diagnose the cause of illness independently and is asked to perform the propitiatory rites to cure the illness. If he is successful in curing illness at least in some cases, he is gradually recognised as a nascent niebu. If after this he can prove
worthy of his profession he acquires an important position in the society. Although all the niebus are not magicians, most of them are found to be expert in black magic.

2.4. In the beginning of his profession a niebu abstains from eating the meat of the animals, sacrificed at the ceremonies performed by him. He takes the meat of such sacrificed animals when he gains reputation and importance in the society. There are gradations among niebus according to their ability in curing sickness and according to their efficiency in black-magic. An expert niebu can prove his powers by destroying a green tree by magic.

2.5. A person thus recognised as niebu keeps a nandung attached to the front wall of his house. A nandung consists of five to six planks of wood, about six to seven feet in length and about six inches in breadth. The upper portion of the wooden pieces is marked with different crude designs. These designs are painted with charcoal powdered with human teeth. In some of the nandungs I noticed some crude human figures. In one such nandung the name of the village and the term 'Jai Hind' are also written. The upright wooden planks are tied to the wall along with some cross planks. On a particular day the villagers make the nandung. The niebu sacrifices three brown cocks on that day and sprinkles it with their blood. A nandung is the trade-mark of the niebu in Dafla society.
2.6. In the nandung are hung some other paraphernalia such as a bamboo clapper, some bamboo pails, and a feather fan. To the feather fan a tiger tooth, one or two kite's claws, one 'sacred stone' (meklang) are also attached. The sacred stone is a quartzite believed to have fallen from the sky as a thunderbolt. After the performance of each propitiatory ceremony for curing illness, the niebu takes home a pail full of the blood of the animals sacrificed and one shoulder bone of the bullock or mithun. He sprinkles the blood on the nandung and hangs the piece of shoulder bone and the bamboo pail on it. From the number of shoulder bones on the nandung one can count the number of important ceremonies performed by the niebu. Pinji Weli who claims to be an expert in that line has performed thirty-five propitiatory rites for curing illness and all the thirty-five shoulder bones are attached to his nandung. The bones of the animals sacrificed in such ceremonies are not preserved, if the patient on whose behalf it was sacrificed did not survive.

2.7. A guardian spirit of the niebu (Hoe-le) is believed to reside in the nandung when the niebu goes out to perform a ceremony, he makes a sound with the bamboo clapper and invokes the name of the spirit. It is believed that the spirit then accompanies him to the house where the ceremony is to be performed. The guardian spirit protects him from other spirits with whom he comes in contact daily.
2.8. Outwardly there is no difference between an ordinary Dakla and a niebu. He leads the life of a general Dakla and no taboo is observed in the routine of daily life. People do not treat him as a niebu when he is not acting as one. There are no food taboos and sexual abstinence is not observed. While going to perform a ceremony a niebu walks majestically. A niebu can generally be differentiated from ordinary men from his serious face. At the time of performing a ceremony the following articles are used by the niebu. In all the important ceremonies a niebu uses a feather fan (muyap) which is kept hanging at his back when he takes rest. A bamboo wand (puddu) is taken either by the niebu or by the bu. The puddu is made of two pieces of bamboo tied together, with the help of cane slips. At both the ends of the puddu some bamboo shavings are tied. A puddu is used only in one ceremony. He also uses one new brush made of bamboo shavings. In one important ceremony (U-lo) the professional robes of a niebus consists of a leopard skin at his back and a flat pieces of silver ornament called dumpin tucked in the front of the hat. The does used are usually of big size. Moreover, both the niebu and bu keep two bamboo pails filled with rice-beer which they drink at frequent intervals while performing a ceremony.

2.9. The niebu and bu receive remuneration (buleng) from their clients either in cash or in kind, after the performance of a ritual. The amount of remuneration varies according to the degree of
seriousness of the ritual performed. The bhuj gets a nominal remuneration, generally a few rupees or a few ordinary beads. The remuneration of an expert bhuj is quite sufficient to maintain his family. Sometimes the bhuj and his client settle the remuneration before the performance of a particular magical rite. The remuneration of the bhuj for performance of black magic is generally high, as it involves a dangerous task at his own risk.

2.10. The office of the bhuj is not hereditary. A Dafila boy always aspires to become a bhuj so that he can exercise influence in his society and live happily with the remuneration earned by virtue of his profession. A man with high social ambition and some intellectual capacity prefers to be a bhuj. Some of the Dafila young men of Betgarh told us that in their boyhood, the Political Officer encouraged them with all possible assistance to study in the local schools. They did not however, go to the school as, in their view, it was better and more profitable to become a bhuj than to waste time in learning in the schools.

2.11. The conspicuous status enjoyed by the bhuj is explainable by the part played by him in a number of important activities of Dafila society. He is a magician-priest, acting as an intermediary between the supernatural world and man. A bhuj is to see that the ritual is correctly performed. His services are essential in all the religious and social ceremonies. At the time of taking oath his
presence is indispensable. In the meeting of elders (nole) the niebu plays an important role and his opinion is always taken into consideration and carries great weight. He is also proficient in black-magic as well as a specialist in counteracting sorcery and witchcraft. The villagers rarely use indigenous or modern medicine. So, when one is ill there is no other means than to approach the niebu for proper diagnosis by divination. He finds out the spirits which are the cause of illness by means of divination and finds out the articles necessary to appease the spirits. When one niebu fails another expert niebu is called for, because they do not consider other methods of curing illness to be effective.

3. Spirit Possession (Nekki-Gene)

3.1. The niebu while chanting his traditional magical formulae for a long time at the time of performing an important ritual, sometimes attains a state of trance or ecstasy. During this period the niebu is believed to be possessed by spirits. When he is thus possessed he becomes restless and starts jumping and shouting. In such a state of trance he forecasts the fate of the villagers. He also answers the questions asked by individuals. Probable attacks by different spirits and the coming of epidemic diseases are forecast by the niebu while in trance. Simultaneously remedial measures against such afflictions are prescribed.

3.2. At the time of nekki-gene strict silence is observed by the assembled persons. No one is allowed to light a match stick and the
fire of the hearth is extinguished. Yawning is also prohibited. It is popularly believed that a possessed niebu can see everything, both inside and outside the house. If a thief happens to enter the village during this time the possessed niebu can detect him. Moreover, if another expert niebu sits outside the house the possessed niebu protests saying, "a tiger is sitting outside, he should go away at once ". The niebu sitting outside follows the order but can return afterwards.

3.3. In some cases the state of trance continues for a very long time and the possessed niebu at last faints and gasps for hearth. Another niebu then offers one cock and an egg to the spirits and after that offering the possessed niebu gradually becomes normal.
CHAPTER FOUR

Section B : Black Magic.

1. Introduction.

1.1. Magic is one of the interesting features of Dafla life. Dafla society is full of rivalry and strife which are reflected in their attempts to attain a superior status in economic and social spheres. Marriage negotiations, in particular, seem to be at the root of many instances of black magic to effect a smooth married life. Quite often again, black magic is resorted to in cases of a long-standing economic rivalry between two families.

1.2. It is believed that black magic strikes persons who have committed a crime. But instances of black magic being used against innocent persons are also reported. One rich man can employ a niebu to destroy the possessions of another rich person by magical means. But it is detected by another niebu, it is considered a serious crime and suitable compensation is claimed from the offender. No one confesses that he has performed black magic against an innocent person, because such an act is socially disapproved; if accused, he does his best to establish his innocence. Black magic is always performed in secret.

2. Types of Black Magic.

2.1. There are two important types of black magic practised by the Daflas. One type is called belek, which is thought to be
contagious in nature, in that the niebu uses some objects belonging to the victim to bring about injury and misery. Of course, there are different types of helok, all of which cannot strictly be called contagious. The other types chatana-tanglek, is a deadly one and it may be termed imitative, since in this case one or two animals representing the enemy are brutally killed. It is believed that the enemy is automatically injured or even killed concomitantly with the magical performance. Black magic is never performed by ordinary persons.

2.2. When a man wants to take revenge on an evil-deer, he approaches an expert niebu privately and consults him about it. Then the aggrieved person somehow collects a little quantity of soil from the footprints of his enemy without the knowledge of the latter. The niebu then performs the black magic at midnight near his own house. He first digs out a hole and keeps the soil of the foot-prints of the enemy inside it along with some poisonous leaves. Next, he fills up the hole with loose soil and keeping one feet over it recites spells. This brings misfortune to the enemy or enemies against whom the black magic is performed.

2.3. There are various forms of helok, but all these are performed to achieve similar ends. In one form, the niebu takes an egg in the left hand and for a long time recites incantations to invoke some evil spirits. After that, he buries the egg in a shallow pit. The evil spirits will cause harm to the enemies
concerned. Or again the niebu may take some dog's blood in a bamboo pail and then sprinkle in it the direction of the house of the person, whom it is meant to affect. In some serious cases the niebu performs this kind of magic with an eye of a bullock or mithun. He takes the eye-ball to the jungle where he pierces it with an arrow-head by reciting spells. It is believed that all these forms of black magic bring misfortune to the victim, provided there is no mistake in the performance. A Dafila can diagnose illness caused by black magic only after consultation with a niebu. A niebu can distinguish between illness caused by spirits and illness caused by black magic.

2.4. In most of the cases recorded belok was performed to take revenge on an enemy. But it can also affect animals.

An interesting case took place in the village sometime back, which was related to me by the son of an expert niebu. One day, his father observed that his mithuns kept away from their fodder. He suspected foul play towards his animals. He found out by divination that another expert niebu who was his rival had applied belok against his mithuns. So he personally approached that niebu and asked him about it. The latter pretended ignorance. So the aggrieved niebu complained about it to the Political Officer stationed at Charduar. The Political Officer warned the suspected culprit for his misdeed, and said that if the mithuns died he would have to pay for it. It so happened that from the next day the animals began to take fodder. According to my informant the culprit performed some sort of counter-magic to bring back the animals to their normal condition.
2.5. The niebu performs such magic very secretly and generally at nightfall. No other person under any circumstances should observe such performances. It is reported that sometime past in the interior hills near Sepla, the wife of a niebu accidentally witnessed such a performance by her husband and she immediately fell ill. The niebu somehow cured his wife by some counter-magical performance. Moreover, those who confess that they perform black magic claimed to have performed it for legitimate purposes. But they do not reveal the cases for the fear of possible conflict and counter-magic. They simply say that in the hills some families were totally destroyed by black magic. They also added that some of these families deserved to be destroyed.

2.6. In some serious cases such as the breach of a marriage contract or a murder a different type of black magic is performed to take revenge, which is known as chotune-tunulek. This is also performed very secretly but some kinsmen of the performer also take part. As it is an elaborate affair this cannot be performed to affect the villagers of the immediate neighbourhood and is never performed against enemies of the same village.

2.7. The person who wants to take revenge on his enemy, approaches an expert niebu and both of them discuss the matter. The niebu settles his remuneration with his client and fixes a day for the performance of the chotune-tunulek. On that day some of the villagers (specially the friends and relatives of the aggrieved party)
assemble near the house at the dead of night. Then one of them
takes a quantity of ashes in a broken basket and leads the pro-
cession of persons to a nearby jungle. They also carry with them
a worn-out broom-stick, a pumpkin, a dog, a brown cock, dao,
shields, bows and arrows. At the time of procession the niebu
and the bu utter incantations and the other persons shout and
jump. The person carrying the basket of ashes has to run quickly
ahead, lest he may be maltreated by the followers. He scatters
the ashes here and there while moving forward.

2.8. On reaching the jungle one of them digs two holes on the
ground, in which the heads of the dog and the cock are introduced.
The holes are then filled with loose soil. The niebu and the bu
utter incantations and strike the dog and the cock with their legs.
No magic can be performed without uttering spells. Through these
spells the niebu is believed to injure the victim. The other people
jump and shout with dao, bows and arrows and shields in their
hands. After this, the dog and cocks are beheaded. Then one of
them cuts the pumpkin into two pieces. On the heads of the cock
and the dog they apply ashes. Then, some of them jump and shout
with bows, arrows, dao and shields in their hands and another group
cuts a big tree. Then they run away to their home as soon as the
tree falls. They do not look back after the performance of this
magic. Sometimes, in chetung-tunglok an eye of a bullock or mithun
is taken and the niebu pierces it with an arrow-head as in belok. The efficacy of the magic lies on the accurate performance of the rite. It is the magical power that destroys the victims. The niebu takes great care to make his magic efficacious.

3.1. The Daflas firmly believe that black magic causes misfortune, illness and even death. The niebus who perform black magic also believe in it very seriously.

Tapeng Tacheng was in a state of mental agony because of the breach of the marriage contract of his daughter with a hill Dafla who serve in his house for six years to get his daughter. His daughter refused to marry the hill Dafla when she grew up. Tapeng told me that he had paid the fine for the breach of the marriage contract, but he was very much afraid that the boy's party might perform ohstung-tungleak, which would definitely bring misfortune to him.

3.2. According to my informants the guilty person or party is always afraid of the effect of black magic and they readily agree with the decision of the meeting of the elders. Moreover, after settlement of disputes like breach of marriage contract, murder, etc., a friendship ceremony pakhe is always performed. It is deemed that there should be no enmity between the two parties after the performance of pakhe. It is also hoped that after this, black magic is not performed by the aggrieved party.
4. The Witches.

4.1. Defias believe that some people are witches (pajeks). The witches can cause harm to others by virtue of an inherent power. Just like the witches of Azande (Evans - Pritchard, 1950, p. 21), the act of witchcraft is a psychic act. A Dafia witch shows no external symptom. But very old and grey haired persons are powerful witches. A witch is called pajekna phunga and a wizard is called pajekna nyakom. Witchcraft is not inherited.

4.2. It is reported that there lived one well-known witch at Betgarh. Fire is reported to have come out of her mouth at night, which moved towards the village road, and sometimes the woman vomitted human hair and hair-balls. They believe that there are a few witches in the village, but they preferred not to point them out.

4.3. It is believed that the witches get their power from the evil spirit called pajek automatically. Although witchcraft is not taken very seriously, it plays its part in various aspects of their day to day life. A sore is wrapped with a piece of cloth in order that it might not be exposed to the eyes of the witch. The mothers also try to keep away their babies from the sight of a witch. A witch can destroy nice seedlings and good fruits in the gardens.

4.4. Death due to witchcraft is said to be rare. But when a witch is considered very dangerous, a niebu may be appointed to take revenge by the aggrieved party.

The niebu makes a hole and over it a slab of stone is kept in a slanting position on a piece of wood. He then breaks the egg and puts the broken egg inside the hole and utters incantations. The witchcraft substance come out of the body of the witch in the form of a rat and enters the hole. The niebu closes up the hole by putting the slab of stone kept over it and the witch dies automatically.
CHAPTER FOUR

Section C : Treatment of Diseases

1. Introduction

1.1. The economic activities of the Dafila people depend entirely on hale and hearty individuals. The villagers of Betgarh, it seems, have been affected by the submountaineous malarious region where they have settled, coming down from the higher regions of the hills. Moreover, while in their hill habitat they were free from tropical diseases which frequently afflict the plains people, since they have migrated to this region they are subject to occasional ailments of tropical diseases which they try to cure and avert through their unfailing faith in their niebu and his practices. Though there is a government hospital nearby, they are not much attracted to modern medicine.

1.2. Sorcery and witchcraft are considered to be secondary sources of sickness. But it is generally believed that illness is caused by evil spirits and the method of curing illness is to undo the work of these spirits. A niebu is engaged, find out by divination the particular spirit which is the cause of the disease. He first performs a simple ceremony, barduna, which consists in placing some bamboo shavings on the roof near the diseased person while reciting the names of some spirits. If the sick person improves after the
barduna the niebu finds out the number of objects and animals to be sacrificed to those spirits. The final propitiation ceremony takes place on a day which is convenient to the family and is performed by the same niebu who performs the divination.

1.3. A person generally does not call in a niebu to find out the cause of a minor complaint. But if the disease is serious, a niebu is called in immediately. A sick person obtains psychological relief only when the niebu begins his work. It is considered a gross negligence on the part of the head of a family if he does not call in a niebu to cure a sick member.

1.4. The most common divinations are resung-rinka (resung means chicken, rinka means divination), and popu rinka (popu means egg). The resung-rinka is performed to find out the spirit which is the cause of the disease. The process of this divination is elaborate and this is done also to find out the number of animals and objects to be sacrificed in the propitiatory ceremony. For barduna and divination the niebu utters monotonous chants which can be heard from a fairly long distance.

1.5. The final ceremony takes place within a month. The exact day depends upon the nature of the ceremony. If it is an elaborate one then it takes time for preparation of large quantities of rice-beer and collection of other articles. A simpler ceremony can be performed shortly after the divination.
2. Oröm Worship

2.1. No attempt is made here to give all the technical details of the propitiation of spirits to cure diseases. The following case illustrates the elaborateness of the ceremonies involved. They were to cure chronic stomach pains in a 45 year old woman.

One morning, a niebu from the Sepla area of NEFA, was busy in divination in front of Tapeng's house. He kept a big pail of rice-beer and holding a chicken in his right hand began to recite some magical formulae in a loud voice. After about ten minutes he cut the chicken and brought out the liver and examined it on a leaf. He thus cut ten chickens within two hours and examined all the livers. At last, from the signs of the livers he declared that an evil spirit, Orem, had captured the soul of Tapeng's wife Releny, and that it should be propitiated in order to cure her. He showed the livers to some other elderly persons sitting near him who also supported his diagnosis. It took about three hours to perform this divination. On the next morning the same niebu performed popu-rikma. The diseased woman Releny boiled one egg and the niebu cut the yolk into pieces using a hair from the woman's head. He examined the yolk very carefully and prescribed that one bullock, one cow, two pigs, one dog and about twenty cocks and hens were to be sacrificed to please Orem.

The final ceremony took place on three consecutive days. On the first day morning, the niebu and his assistant (bu) came to the house of the sick person reciting formulae and many of the villagers assembled at the back of the house to see the gali ceremony. One of them dug out a hole at the back of the house in which a piece of ginger, an egg and some powdered rice mixed with rice-beer were kept. Then the niebu thrust into the hole a piece of wood (gali) decorated with green leaves and bamboo mat. At that time the assembled
persons shouted loudly. It is believed that if a portion of yolk comes out from the hole at the time of thrusting the gali, it is a bad sign. Otherwise it is good for the sick person and the other members of the family. In that particular case the sign was found to be a good one.

At this time a boy was beating a drum and the niebu and the bu recited incantations very quickly. The person for whom the ceremony was performed came down from the house and applied some powdered rice mixed with rice-beer to the gali and poured some rice-beer over it. Then the assembled persons entered the house by the ladder of the back door and the niebu and the bu followed them.

At the time of climbing the ladder the niebu with the help of bamboo shavings in his hand, drove away the souls of other deceased niebus by reciting some incantations. The belief is that the souls of such deceased niebus generally obstruct the path of the niebu who performs the ceremony. So he addressed such souls, "I have come to propitiate the spirits, so you should not obstruct my path". Then he also touched some pots of rice-beer kept near his path, with the help of bamboo shavings. This he did to make sour rice-beer sweet and tasteful by magical means. It is also believed that after this act rice-beer will never be sour in the family for years to come.

Then both the niebu and the bu entered the house and sat in the middle of the platform of the house near the hearth. They took rest for sometime and refreshed themselves with rice-beer. After this the niebu began to tell some stories and the bu repeated them in short. The niebu recited in detail how some expert niebus cured disease on the earth, disease of the trees, the sky and other cosmic bodies. Thus for the whole afternoon they recited such stories. The places they pretended to visit, are called sorungtron, soromoron, soron, myadrong etc. When they are
supposed to arrive at the bank of a river in the course of their pretended journeys both of them pretended to build a bridge for crossing it. They invited the presiding spirits of different places to the ceremony. The people assembled for the occasion consumed large quantities of rice-beer.

When such journeys were supposed to be completed they all remained silent for some time. Beleyu, for whom the ceremony was performed, brought one carrying basket and kept it inverted in the middle of the house. On the top of the basket a stick (called pedu, used by the niebu and the bu at the time of performing the ceremony) was kept in an upright position. Beleyu tied one piece of dried fish to the stick. After that the assembled persons were offered rice-beer and they created a noisy atmosphere till midnight. The niebu and the bu took food on the same dish and slept there for the rest of the night.

Next day, early in the morning they again pretended to go on similar journeys to different places of the spirits and thus they spent the whole day. In the afternoon a pig and few cocks were sacrificed to the spirits. In the evening, similar ceremonies were performed as on the previous evening. In some cases the niebu while reciting the names of the spirits faints under hallucination. He is supposed to be possessed by some spirits, which reveal themselves through their human media, the niebus.

The third was the final day of the ceremony, and from the morning the niebu and the bu by recitation informed the spirits that such and such articles would be offered to them. Then after some time, they recited the story of Rebe and Tani, that is their traditional story of origin. Some male members of the village (mostly kinsmen and relatives) came early in the morning and all of them were busy in making bamboo shavings. They made a sacrificial structure of wooden poles decorated with bamboo shavings and bamboo mats. The sacrificial structure (ngapong) is supposed to be the
temporary residence of spirits. A big nyagong was meant for the principal spirit and some small nyagongs were also made for other minor spirits. Most of the nyagongs were made in front of the house, but some small nyagongs were also made at the back of the house.

At this time Releny came down well dressed and wearing ornaments and poured some rice-beer mixed with some powdered rice as an offering to the big nyagong. A boy was beating a drum and the niebu and the bu recited prayers.

In the afternoon, the ceremony proper began. There was a large gathering. In the big nyagong a cow and a bullock were tied with ropes. To the smaller nyagong a goat, a dog and some cocks were tied. The niebu and the bu came down from the house through the ladder of the back door and recited prayers loudly. First some cocks were sacrificed. Then they entered the house and sacrificed a pig by piercing it with a dao near the forelimbs. After that, they again came down from the house and a clansman sacrificed the animals one after another. The person who kills the animals must belong to the same clan as the person for whom the ceremony is performed. At the time of sacrificing the animals the assembled persons shouted very loudly. The niebu kept the heads of the sacrificed animals and birds on the nyagong. At first a he-goat and then a cock was sacrificed. Inside the house a pig was sacrificed by piercing a dao near the forelimbs. After this cocks and a dog were sacrificed and at the end a cow and a bullock were sacrificed. The animals were sacrificed with a big dao, mostly with one stroke. The cocks were sacrificed by sawing the necks with a dao.

After finishing the sacrifice the niebu and the bu moved around the big nyagong searching for the soul (yale) of the sick person. Next, they went to the back door of the house and they asked the persons inside whether the soul had come back or not.
It is said that the persons inside always reply in the positive.

The bu asked:

"Beleny saopakru ?" (i.e. Beleny have you come?)

The persons inside the house replied:

"Saopaku, Saopaku, tasere, mai, nefenze, kau, nera, pane tagel appakku (i.e. came back, came back, with beads bells, wives, children, slaves and female slaves, she came back).

After that they all entered the house. The assembled persons were offered plenty of rice-beer. Further, they roasted the livers of the sacrificed animals which were distributed among the guests. They also distributed the meat among the persons present, keeping a large share for the family. No other ceremony was performed that night. On the morning of the fourth day the niebu took some water in a bamboo pail and kept some bamboo shavings inside it. The sick person, Beleny, put her legs on a wooden seat and the niebu sprinkled water on them, asking the spirits not to harm her again. Then he sprinkled water over the nyagonge also. After this the sick person was asked not to see the niebu for some time.

2.2. The Ulo and Orom worships are very elaborate and the expenditure involved is very heavy varying from Rs. 500'00 to Rs. 1,500'00. The niebu is paid Rs. 20'00 to Rs. 25'00 and the bu is paid Rs. 10'00 as remuneration in addition, a dae or an Assamese silk cloth is paid to the niebu. The niebu is also given 10 beads which are tied round his hair-bun. In addition, the niebu and the bu get a good portion of the meat from the hind limbs of the animals sacrificed.
2.3. After the performance of such a big ceremony, no other person except some known Daflas is allowed to enter the compound of the family for three days. This is called arri. A signal is given by inserting a wooden stake at the entrance to the compound to which bamboo shavings are tied. It is held to be a serious offence for strangers to enter the compound. Many non-Dafla strangers had to pay heavy fines at Betgarh for breaking this rule. After the ceremony the people of that particular village do not enter the jungle for fear of spirits. The person for whom the ceremony is performed should not go to the jungle for seven days after the ceremony and things like banana, pulses, onion are also tabu for him for one month.

2.4. There are variations in the ceremonies performed for curing diseases. It all depends upon the nature of the disease and also upon divination. In cases of serious diseases "Ulo and Grom" worship take place for three days, as described above. In such worship many domesticated animals and cocks are sacrificed. The number of animals and cocks varies according to the findings of the niebu by divination, but for such a ceremony, one mithun, one cow, one bullock, one goat, two pigs and nearly ten cocks are always necessary. There are simple types of ceremonies in which only one bullock or a pig and cocks are sacrificed.

2.5. In a paper published earlier (1962, P. 57) I have discussed the Dafla spirit world in detail. In addition to the Dafla deities and
spirits a number of Gods and Godesses of the Hindu pantheon have been incorporated, which has increased the list of deities to be propitiated. The Daflas of Betgarh try to adapt themselves to the ecological and cultural surroundings in which they find themselves. Their adaptibility is well illustrated by their adoption of some of the Hindu deities worshipped by the neighbouring Assamese people. The deities worshipped by the Assamese villagers are propitiated through the medium of Assamese. These deities are propitiated only when the nimbuses declare that particular Assamese deities (hareng oïya) have afflicted the sick person. Only Assamese-knowing nimbuses can successfully propitiate the deity concerned through the medium of Assamese.

2.6. On occasions like this restrictions imposed by the Assamese society are fully observed by the Daflas as well. Cow slaughtering for example is prohibited when such deities are propitiated. In the same way fruit and vegetable offerings, as offered by the Assamese people, are collected on the occasion of performing a ritual for appeasement of Assamese deities. It is believed that Assamese deities need to be propitiated by the methods used by the Assamese people, and a social and religious atmosphere in which the Assamese deities feel at home is created in the Dafla house. In certain cases neighbouring Nepali experts are also employed in curing diseases by magical or propitiatory ceremonies.
CHAPTER FOUR

Section D

Belief Regarding Soul after Death and Death Rituals.

1. Belief in Soul

1.1. Death involves elaborate rituals and sacrifices. It is the duty of a dead man’s family to see that his soul (yalo) gets the proper ritualistic treatment. It is believed that after death the soul goes to the land of the spirits called Oiyu-mloko safely. Oiyu-mloko is believed to be similar to this world and is situated below the earth. It is inhabited by the souls of the dead and also by a large number of spirits. The eschatological concepts of the Tibate-Burman speaking hill-tribes on the borders of Assam have certain broad similarities; Nagas, Lushais, Garos, Abors, Daflas and Apa Tanis appear to have basically similar ideas about the fate of the departed in the land of the Dead (Haimendorf, 1962, P.146).

1.2. Like the Apa Tanis the Daflas believe that souls of all those who have died a natural death go to the Land of the Dead.

Life in the Oiyu-mloko is, by and large, similar to the life on the earth. But the difference is that the eyes of the persons in the Land of the Dead are situated in the back of the head. There the persons roam about aimlessly. Their houses are in a poor condition. Cultivation is done but no importance is attached to it. The soul
of the deceased meets the souls of his dead relatives in that world.

A rich man on earth will be rich in the other world and a poor will be poor. The Daflas do not believe in reincarnation.

2. Burial and Death Ceremonies.

2.1. Death involves expenditure that varies according to the nature of the death. A detailed description of a funeral ceremony is given below. The rituals are performed very seriously for the safe journey of the soul to the Land of the Dead.

2.2. A niebu attends a sick man till all hope of recovery is abandoned. In most cases the medicine man performs the barduna ceremony as a last resort, when they read the signs of approaching death. The experienced persons confirm the fact of death by touching the dead body. The relations gather and weep around the corpse. The Daflas do not bring out the dead body from inside the house. The son of the deceased or any other elderly clansman first unties his lock of hair. He also cut off a portion of the finger nail of the deceased and keeps it in a cane basket. It is believed that if a portion of nail of the deceased is not kept, the evil spirit will easily capture the souls of other members of the family. One elderly member of the family offers some boiled rice and rice-beer near the dead body. If the deceased was addicted to smoking and betel nut chewing these things are also offered. Only very little food is offered near the dead body, because if much is offered the soul might delay its departure to the other world.
2.3. The chief mourner, with the help of other relatives and clansmen, prepares the dead body for burial. In the case of an adult a chain of a few beads is tied round the neck of the deceased. Prior to placing the corpse inside the burial place it is so prepared that the knees are placed in a dorsiflexed position, the heels almost touching the hip bones; and the hands are placed on either side of the face. The corpse is then wrapped in this position by means of an endi cloth. The corpse is thus made ready for burial.

2.4. They kindle a fire near the dead body. If a person dies at night the burial takes place next day. Hearing the news the kinsmen and neighbours of the deceased assemble at the place. If the deceased is an old or adult one, other villagers also come to the house. It is customary that no one should be called in to the house of the deceased by the members of the family. The people should come voluntarily on hearing the news. The neighbours throng to the residence of the deceased on hearing the cry.

2.5. If death occurs at night the assembled persons sit near the dead body for the whole night. If available, they take rice-beer. At midnight the elderly members perform a ceremony for driving away spirits called hoseufo or hoseu-mingfena. The chief mourner first shoots an arrow on the roof near the front door of the house. The other persons then shout and shoot arrows from the front door to the back door. The niebu recites incantations to drive away the spirits, who ones believed to have caused the death. Most of the assembled persons spend the night without sleep.
2.6. The Dafnas bury their dead. They never cremate them. The method of burial varies according to the age and status of the deceased. With the exception of accidental deaths, they bury the dead bodies within the family compound. The spot of burial is selected ceremonially. The chief mourner takes a piece of pointed bamboo stick in his right hand. The medicine man recites incantations and the chief mourner inserts the pointed bamboo stick into the soil, here and there. The place where the pointed stick goes down to a considerable depth automatically, as it were, is finally selected as the right spot for the burial.

2.7. Then the wrapped dead body is measured with a piece of bamboo stick. The chief mourner first digs a portion of the grave and the other assembled persons complete it according to the measurements. Bamboo mats are placed all round the grave. In one case of burial of an influential medicine man a wooden box was made inside which the dead body was enclosed. Some male kin of the deceased cut the corpse through the back door of the house. Then they place the corpse in a lying position in the grave. Over it a bamboo mat is placed so that the soil may not come in direct contact with the dead body.

2.8. Inside the grave they bury a chicken alive. It is believed that the chicken will not die and it will eat up the earth-worms and insects which might injure the dead body. In the case of burial
in a wooden box a chicken was also enclosed within it. Inside the grave some articles used by the deceased such as dao, cane hat, a few beads, are also buried as grave offerings. In case of death of a niebu, a dao is placed on the right hand of the dead body. Some rich persons fill up the grave with paddy. Above the grave a mound of about one foot high is made with a flat piece of wood and is covered with soil. Above the mound bamboo sticks are inserted so that animals cannot dig up the grave.

2.9. After the burial all the persons who have touched the dead body and who have taken part in the burial go to a nearby river and bathe. Women who have touched the corpse also bathe in the river. A niebu ties an egg to a bunch of grasses with long leaves and holding this in his right hand recites magical formulae. After bath, he first touches the chief mourner with the bunch of grass reciting incantations and then touches the other persons too.

2.10. Then they return home. Before entering the house the medicineman performs some purificatory rites with the bunch of grass. In case of death of an old person, before going for ceremonial bath, the persons taking part in the burial place some loose powdered soil over the burial place (nyebong). After bath they minutely examine the burial place. If the footprint of a tiger is noticed, it is supposed that the deceased must have killed or done some harm to a tiger. In this case it is believed that the soul (vale or bong)
will be taken by a tiger and it cannot go to oivo-mloke, the land of the dead. If they find a human foot-print on burial place, it signifies the certain death of an influential person of the village. Then they enter the house through the back door. On entering the house the chief mourner throws a handful of soil towards the east and another handful towards the west. Then he takes a small quantity of rice-beer from a gourd vessel which he breaks immediately afterwards. He also takes a small amount of boiled rice from a dish and throws down the rest below the platform. After this the assembled persons take rice-beer. On the same day a bullock or a pig is sacrificed to the deceased.

2.11. On the grave a conical structure resting on a rectangular platform is made with four bamboo poles. (In the case of the death of Jamuna's father who was a very influential medicineman, very strong bamboo platforms were made over the grave and some persons spent five nights there, performed the spirit-driving ceremony). Some of them kindle a big fire and spend the night in the burial place. For three nights they perform the spirit-driving ceremony. Some persons take bow and arrow and other, dao and spear in their hand. Then they first shoot arrows inside the house and shout. They come down through the backdoor to the burial place and shoot arrows into the grave also. The medicineman also recites magical formulas to drive away the spirits.
2.12. On the morning after the burial, the medicine-man sacrifices one cock and mixes a few drops of blood of the sacrificed bird in a tumbler of water. He then takes a bunch of thatch with an egg tied to it. He recites magical formulae and moves the bunch round and round until the egg breaks. The members of the family and those taking part in the burial wash their hands and feet with water mixed with blood. This is the purificatory ceremony (fedorna) and no other purificatory ceremony takes place. Food is offered daily on the grave up to the fifth day after burial. In the case of an influential person a bullock or a pig is sacrificed on the fifth day near the grave. It is believed that the soul goes to the land of the dead on the fifth day after burial. The soul makes a sound like a bird at the time of going away from the grave.

2.13. The son-in-law must offer a pig or a cock at the grave within a month after death. He kills the cock on the grave with a piece of bamboo held in his left hand. This ceremony is called randen-dona. In some cases the son-in-law also offers an Assamese silk cloth and a dao. After this offering the son-in-law says - "this is my last payment to you. From now onwards, I shall pay you nothing".

2.14. After the death of a person certain types of food are tabued to the family members. Potato, gourd, porcupine meat, banana, brinjal and crab are strictly tabued. Breach of tabu is believed to be followed by adverse affects. Eating potato, for example, is
believed to be punished by an illness, namely, glandular swelling. If prawn is taken, the teeth fall off immurely. Sweet-gourd is also tabued in that period, because if it is taken, the veins swell. If porcupine meat is taken, the hair is believed to turn grey like a porcupine's thorns. Banana and brinjal produce black spots on the cheek. Crabs and some other fish live in holes like a dead body in the grave. So crab and these other fishes are also tabued.

2.15. The eldest son acts as the chief mourner. If a man dies without children a near relative or a clansman takes the place of the son. Where an adult or old person dies, the family is not considered ceremonially unclean. A medicine man performs the purificatory rites in these cases also, but the clansmen and other villagers freely take food with the bereaved family. The death of a child is considered to be due to the sin of the parents. Some near relatives and very few neighbours visit and take part in a child's burial. The burial rites are similar in case of death of a child, but the spirit-driving ceremony is performed for one night only. A fire is kindled near the grave for five consecutive nights after the burial, but no one spends the night near the grave. The medicine man gets a higher remuneration for performing the purificatory death ceremony of a child.

2.16. There is no difference in the details of burial of the body of a man or a woman. But in case of the death of a pregnant woman,
the family is considered to be ceremonially unclean and no one takes food in that family for one month. The niebu charges a higher fee for performing the purificatory ceremony. The soul of a pregnant woman is supposed to become an evil spirit which harms other pregnant women. The foetus is not separated at the time of burial. If the mother dies after childbirth, a few pieces of broken pan are kept over the body of the surviving child. The deceased woman is buried in the way described above.

2.17. The dead body is usually buried just near the house. In the case of accidental death the corpse is buried away from the house, but the other rites are the same. If a person is killed by a tiger they suppose that it is due to the sin of the person. Such a man is also buried away from the house-hold, and the family is held to be ceremonially unclean for one month. The niebu gets a higher remuneration for performing the purificatory rite in this case. In case of murder with a dae the dead body is buried away from the house. The corpse is placed in a sitting position in the grave and a dae is placed in his right hand. No case of suicide in the village is recorded. In such cases also the corpse should be buried away from the household.

2.18. In cases of unnatural death the soul cannot go to the sivu-niloko but roams over the sky, nyeko-kole. In cases of accidental death, death in war, and death due to suicide the soul roams over the sky which is considered undesirable.
2.19. The Daflas believe when a man is asleep, his soul wanders about here and there. It may go to oivu-sleko where it meets the souls of the sleeping man's dead relatives. Sometimes it is not allowed to return to earth. When this happens, it is believed that the sleeping man will die.

3. Attitude Towards other Religious Faiths.

3.1. It has already been stated that the Daflas of Betgarh have incorporated a number of deities of the Hindus to their pantheon whom they worship according to Hindu rites. On few occasions they performed Vaisnavite Bhaona type of drama at the instance of a social reformer of that locality. But it seems that they are not attracted towards Hinduism. In fact, they do not regard Hinduism or any other religion as superior to their own.